

Tips for Preventing Heat-Related Illness

People suffer heat-related illness when the body's temperature control system is overloaded. The body normally cools itself by sweating, but under some conditions, sweating just isn't enough.

Warning signs of heat exhaustion include: heavy sweating, paleness, muscle cramps, tiredness, weakness, dizziness, headache, nausea or vomiting, and or fainting. The skin may be cool and moist. The pulse rate will be fast and weak and breathing will be fast and shallow.

Seek medical attention immediately if symptoms are severe, or if the victim has heart problems or high blood pressure. Otherwise, help the victim to cool off, and seek medical attention if symptoms worsen or last longer than one hour. If heat exhaustion is untreated, it may progress to heat stroke.

The American Medical Association recognizes two forms of heat stroke. Classic heat stroke occurs without exertion, generally among people at risk—the elderly, infants and persons with chronic illness. Exertional heat stroke usually occurs in young, otherwise healthy adults who are engaging in rigorous exercise in the absence of heat acclimatization (e.g., athletes, construction workers and soldiers).

The best defense against heat-related illness is prevention. Staying cool and making simple changes in your fluid intake, activities, and clothing during hot weather can help you to remain safe and healthy.

Prevention Tips:

- ✓ Increase your fluid intake—regardless of your activity level. Don't wait until you feel thirsty to drink fluids. Ensure infants and children drink adequate amounts of liquids.
- ✓ Limit exercise in a hot environment, and drink 2–4 glasses of fruit juice or a sports beverage each hour.
- ✓ Avoid drinks containing caffeine, alcohol, or large amounts of sugar because they will actually cause you to lose more fluid. Also, avoid very cold beverages because they can cause stomach cramps.
- ✓ Stay indoors and in an air-conditioned environment. If air conditioning is not available, consider a visit to a shopping mall, public library, movie theater, supermarket or other air-conditioned location for a few hours.
- ✓ Contact your local public health agency to see if there are any heat-relief shelters in your area.

- ✓ Ask your doctor whether medications you take affect your body's response to the heat.
- ✓ Electric fans may be useful to increase comfort and to draw cool air into your home at night, but do not rely on a fan as your primary cooling device during a heat wave. When the temperature is in the upper 90s or higher, a fan will not prevent heat-related illness. A cool shower or bath is a more effective way to cool off.
- ✓ If you must be out in the heat, try to plan your activities so that you are outdoors either before noon or in the evening.
- ✓ While outdoors, rest frequently in a shady area so that your body's thermostat has a chance to recover.
- ✓ Wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing. When outdoors, a wide-brimmed hat will provide shade and keep the head cool. Infants and young children should also be dressed in cool, loose clothing and their heads and faces shaded from the sun with hats or an umbrella.
- ✓ NEVER leave anyone in a closed, parked vehicle.
- ✓ Wear sunscreen to protect skin from the sun's harmful rays. Sunburn affects your body's ability to cool itself and causes a loss of body fluids.
- ✓ If unaccustomed to working or exercising in a hot environment, start slowly, pick up the pace gradually and limit your exercise or work time.
- ✓ When working in the heat, monitor the condition of your co-workers and have someone do the same for you. If you are 65 years of age or older, have a friend or relative call to check on you twice a day when hot weather health advisories have been issued.
- ✓ Check regularly on those at greatest risk of heat-related illness:
 - infants and children up to 4 years of age
 - people 65 years of age or older
 - people who are overweight
 - people who overexert during work or exercise
 - people who are ill or on certain medications

Be aware that any sudden change in temperature, such as an early summer heat wave, will be stressful on your body. You will have a greater tolerance for the heat if you limit your physical activity until you become accustomed to the heat. If traveling to a hotter climate, allow several days to become acclimated before attempting any vigorous exercise, and work up to it gradually.

Further information on prevention of heat-related illness can be obtained through the Department of Health Home Page at <http://www.health.state.mo.us/ColdAndHeat/CAndH.html> or by calling the Office of Epidemiology at (573) 751-6128.